

## **Written Testimony To Amend and Support Proposed House Bill 7285, An Act Concerning Complaints That Allege Misconduct By Law Enforcement Agency Personnel**

Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Andy Schatz, and I am a resident of Westbrook, Connecticut. I testify in support of Proposed House Bill 7285 (and amendments described below) concerning the acceptance, processing, and investigation of a complaint of alleged police misconduct.

Respect and trust for our police are critical, and depend upon transparency. As a long-time resident and town council member in West Hartford, I saw from different perspectives the importance of police-community relations. My neighbors and I in Westbrook depend upon state police to supplement our limited small-town public safety personnel. In both towns, as in others, residents have always understood the danger inherent in police work but also the danger of misconduct and lack of transparency. As with all responsibility, criticism is essential to accountability and improvement, and "complaints" are the key part of that process.

A recent survey by the ACLU of Connecticut clearly shows that many Connecticut police agencies have inappropriately made it difficult for members of the public to file complaints. Many departments don't have the required forms, or don't include them on websites as required. Many require unnecessary steps, such as notarization and in-person filing. Many have inconsistent practices.

Proposed House Bill 7285 recognizes that our police complaint process is broken, but we must go further than the language in that original bill to fix it. We should amend H.B. 7285 to:

- 1) create a standardized complaint form, compliant with best practices and translated into all commonly-spoken languages in Connecticut,
- 2) establish meaningful penalties for law enforcement agencies that do not comply with state complaint acceptance and investigation laws, and
- 3) require law enforcement agencies to track complaint data and to annually report specific complaint information to the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management.

These amendments will not only compel compliance but will make it more simple and uniform. The bill as amended will help ensure a transparent, accessible police complaint process and a fair and just police force in Connecticut—one that all of us can respect and trust.

I urge the members of this committee to amend and support Proposed House Bill 7285.

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